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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [UP](#) [MD](#) [RU](#) [EU](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE'S VIEW OF THE TRANSNISTRIA CONFLICT
REF: CHISINAU 0081

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Taylor, Reason 1.4 (b and d)

Summary

1. (C) A series of calls on Ukrainian officials to discuss Ukrainian views of Transnistria issues and the "5 2" process, particularly in light of the March 18 joint statement signed by the parties of the Russia-sponsored "2 1" process (Moldova, Russia, Transnistria), revealed Ukrainian concerns about how to protect national interests in the face of questionable motivations of other participants. While interlocutors were cynical about Russian intentions in the region and what lies behind the creation of the high-profile "2 1" parallel discussion forum, they stressed that Ukraine believes "5 2" can move forward. End Summary.

Objectives for Settlement of the Transnistria Conflict

2. (C) According to Viktor Kryshanivskyi, Special Representative of Ukraine for Transnistrian Settlement, who represents Ukraine in the 5 2 talks, Ukraine remains fully committed to the objectives of territorial integrity for Moldova, as laid out in the "Yushchenko Plan". This includes preserving the territorial integrity of Moldova while securing the largest possible autonomy for Transnistria, within Moldova. First Deputy Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council Havrysh echoed this policy to us recently, noting that Ukraine stands behind the Yushchenko Plan as the best possible approach to resolving the conflict. Kryshanivskyi stressed that Ukraine would "never do anything to damage the territorial integrity of Moldova".

3. (C) Ukraine strongly believes that any agreements reached must include the participation of all "5 2" partners. According to Kryzhanivskyi, while Ukraine does not object in principle to "consultations" taking place in the "1 2" format, these cannot be more than consultations. Of particular importance to Ukraine's interests is that discussions on border demarcation remain firmly anchored in the 5 2 process. He said that Ukraine believes it would be useful to invoke the Istanbul commitments to prompt the demilitarization of Transnistria.

Other Ukrainian Interests

4. (C) Ihor Dolgov, until recently Chief of the Main Service for Foreign Policy at the Presidential Secretariat (and also formerly Special Representative for Transnistria), claimed that there are 40,000 Ukrainians in Transnistria, and a number of Ukrainian equities affected by the conflict resolution process, including property claims and energy security issues.

5. (C) Havrysh raised questions about the worsening economy in Transnistria, noting that Moscow is encouraging greater Russian investment in Transnistria and also encouraging Transnistrians to take Russian citizenship - a persuasive offer that conveys economic and intangible benefits such as

freedom of movement and educational opportunities that do not exist for many Transnistrians. According to Kryzhanivskyi, the government of Ukraine tries to assist Ukrainians in Transnistria through outreach programs and support for education, but noted that Ukraine takes a fairly low profile approach that will not trespass on Chisinau's sovereignty.

Ukraine's view of the situation on the ground

¶6. (C) At the MFA, Kryshaniivskyi, who took up his duties in September 2008, said frankly that his first impression was that both sides are happy with the status quo, and there is a profound lack of trust between them. He could see no eagerness for flexibility on the Transnistrian side, and noted that Transnistrians, and in particular, Transnistrian officials, have been living relatively comfortably in a quasi-state; an entire generation has now grown up with no concept of a unified Moldova. With every year, he said, the possibility of reuniting becomes more distant. His commentary was echoed by Dolgov, who noted that Tiraspol "has not been inconvenienced by its positions."

¶7. (C) At the same time, Transnistria also is obviously growing more dependent on Moscow, said Kryshaniivskyi, highlighting Transnistria's need for financing and legitimization. Both he and Havrysh noted that Transnistria increasingly insists on being treated as a sovereign country in discussions, seeking parity even in working groups and commissions. Havrysh opined that discussions on demarcation could be wrapped up quickly, for example, if parity in discussions were an option.

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Future of 5 2

¶8. (C) Regretting that Moscow's 1 2 approach allows it an opportunity to create a "political regency" by playing on the two sides' desire for Russian support and recognition, Havrysh noted that a real assessment of the Moldovan position won't be possible until after the April elections, as (Moldovan President) Voronin seeks to curry favor with Moscow as a campaign tactic.

¶9. (C) After elections, Havrysh commented, there should be a strong push from the U.S., EU, and Ukraine for 5 2 talks, and U.S. and EU foreign policy leadership in maintaining the 5 2 format will be crucial to any progress on Transnistria. At the MFA, Kryshaniivskyi said the process needs a strong dose of leadership - if it will be from the OSCE, then the OSCE should step up. Kryshaniivskyi recommended a clear vision be presented of an agenda for 5 2 discussions for the year, and a specific meeting schedule tabled. The April meeting in Vienna would be the time to achieve such progress, he noted. While not providing a specific vision, Kryshaniivskyi alluded that the joint statement signed by the 1 2 group in Moscow on March 18 could be used as a hook for bringing the parties back to the 5 2 process. He said that he will accept an offer by Russian Transnistria Conflict Negotiator Nestarushkin to visit Moscow for further consultations in mid or late April.

¶10. (C) Kryshaniivskyi noted some concerns, also raised by Havrysh at the NSDC, about the intentions of the EU and Special Representative for Moldova Kalman Mizsei. Based on confidential papers the MFA had seen and Mizsei's frequent trips to Moscow (without reciprocal visits to Ukraine, for example), he confided an emerging GoU concern that the EU is working behind the scenes with Moscow to neutralize both Ukrainian and U.S. roles in the discussions, hoping to find common EU-Russian ground and present it as a fait accompli. Meeting again after the Moscow 2 1 joint statement, Kryshaniivskyi later attempted to downplay these concerns and said the Europeans had caught wind of Ukrainian suspicions and had been making overtures to reduce them.

Demarcation and Demilitarization

¶11. (C) According to Kryshaniivskyi, the demarcation of the Ukrainian-Moldovan border is complete except for the Transnistrian portion, some 900 kilometers. In the past, Ukraine has raised its concerns about smuggling activity along this border, however, none of our interlocutors raised illicit trading as their main concern. According to Kryshaniivskyi, cooperation with both the EU (through the EUBAM (EU Border Assistance and Monitoring Project) and the U.S. has been effective in reducing opportunities for smuggling, and has provided a less-politicized venue where Moldovan, Transnistrian, and EU member states with an interest (such as Romania), can come together at the experts level to discuss common interests.

¶12. (C) However, demarcation remains a central Ukrainian concern according to all of our interlocutors, each of whom shared misgivings about the presence of Russian troops along an un-demarcated border -- a common problem along most of Ukraine's borders, and one that Havrysh said could lead to conflict.

¶13. (C) Not surprisingly, in our meetings there was unanimous Ukrainian support for full demilitarization of Transnistria, and opposition to any Russian base in Moldova/Transnistria. Both NSDC and MFA flagged a rumor that Russia plans to increase its troop presence in Transnistria, and Kryshaniivskyi told us he had raised the issue with de facto president Smirnov in Tiraspol, letting him know that Ukraine would "never allow" the transit of Russian troops through Ukraine for this purpose. Ukraine hopes to raise CFE Istanbul commitments as a hook to prevent further increases, and move decisively toward demilitarization.

Russia

¶14. (C) Ukrainian concerns about Russian intentions in the conflict, in the region, and toward Ukraine underlie most of our discussions on Transnistria, and tend to surface quickly. At MFA, Kryshaniivskyi said plainly that Russia has no interest in solving the conflict, that Russia intends to increase its troop presence in Transnistria, and that it is using funding, investment, and passport issuance as leverage there. Furthermore, Russia was also using financial and political support for Voronin as leverage in Moldova, and the 1 2 format of discussions meant that Russia was essentially free to make deals with the two sides to further its "political regency" objective.

¶15. (C) At the same time, Kryshaniivskyi was inclined to

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seek a way to use the March 18 2 1 agreement as a tool for moving 5 2 forward; in a cynical aside, he said "we all knew they (Russia, Transnistria, and Moldova) were up to something, and were working on some sort of agreement." Nesterushkin voluntarily visited Kyiv on March 23 to provide a readout for Ukraine on the content of the agreement and the discussions the week before in Russia. Kryshaniivskyi said his talks with Nesterushkin had gone well, and although Ukraine's larger concerns remained, it would be important to see the OSCE use the opportunity in early April to build on the 1 2 agreement. He had no immediate comment on whether the agreement gives Russia all it needs to maintain its troops indefinitely in the region.

¶16. (C) At the NSDC, we heard that any solution has to be in Moscow's interest and that "looking good is not their (Moscow's) concern." Furthermore, Russia was working to expand diplomatic and commercial ties in Transnistria and Moldova to put both under Russian economic control and compromise their political positions. Russian FM (and, according to Havrysh, "chief ideologue") Lavrov's visit to Chisinau on the eve of presidential elections was not coincidental or insignificant.

¶17. (C) After Georgia, Havrysh said, Russia knows no one will stop them in using force, and that force is the most expedient means of achieving political goals. He noted that Moscow is putting finishing touches on its new military doctrine, and that settling regional conflicts through use of force is included; he also noted an increase in Russian assertions that it must protect the security of its citizens abroad.

¶18. (C) Havrysh claimed Ukraine has intelligence showing that Russia was relocating forces towards its borders with Ukraine, including moving Russian troops in Transnistria to the Ukrainian border; Russia also recently conducted high-profile war games with Belarus in which trans-border actions were not ruled out. At the Presidential Secretariat, Dolgov told us that Russia is seeking to project its power, and there is a direct connection to its conduct in the Caucasus. "There is no punishment, so why not?" he asked rhetorically.

Comment

¶19. (C) For Ukrainian officials, Transnistria is viewed from a purely Ukrainian perspective that seems motivated more by deep suspicions of Russia's strategic intentions, than by concern for the potential for resumed conflict between Moldova and Transnistria. The hope of using the Istanbul commitments as a hook to influence Russia's approach to the conflict is strange, given that Russia has withdrawn from CFE. Ukraine is counting on the U.S. and EU to provide firm leadership in resuming 5 2 talks, with the hope of tempering, if not thwarting, what Kyiv sees as an obvious Russian play to regain political, military, and economic hegemony in the region.

TAYLOR